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"Before Abraham Was I Am": Does Philo Explain John 8:56-58?

P. Linwood Urban Jr.
Swarthmore College

P. Henry

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Linwood Urban and Patrick Henry

"It has always been recognized that Johannine thought has some sort of affinity with that of Philo."[1] C. H. Dodd, one of the most vigorous exponents of the theory of deep and pervasive Philonic flavoring in the Fourth Gospel, wrote thus in 1953, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were only beginning to be published, and his *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* contains 136 references to the works of Philo and not a single reference to the Qumran documents. His *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963), written ten years later, includes four references to the Dead Sea Scrolls, three of them in a single footnote (p. 263) with the conclusion, "It would therefore be temerarious to find here any contact between the Fourth Gospel and Qumran."

Dodd's claims for Philonic influence on John appear in retrospect to have been a kind of last--though eloquent--gasp of a tradition whose demise was signalled when a shepherd accidentally discovered the first of the Qumran caves. In the late 1930s, K. and S. Lake, discussing the provenance of the Fourth Gospel, said that "internal evidence would rather suggest Alexandria, for the gospel is extremely Philonic." In 1966 R. E. Brown was much more reserved in his assessment of Philo and John, being willing to admit only a certain (hypothetical) common background. R. Bultmann, as is well known, considers that Philo, along with Paul and the deutero-Pauline literature, presupposes the same Gnostic Logos-Redeemer myth he sees at the base of Johannine theology. And W. Schmithals very recently (1971)

Linwood Urban and Patrick Henry are Professors of Religion at Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

declares, "Above all it must be said that nothing in the Gospel points to its origin in Egypt or Asia Minor." As early as 1923, however, the triumph of today's orthodoxy was foreseen. In that year C. C. Torrey, with his own axes to grind, said, "The theory that the book represents Philonic philosophy (though lacking all the principal features of that school of thought) is no longer in the foreground, its adherents are a dwindling minority."[2]

New Testament theories are peculiarly susceptible to *peripeteia*, and there have been few reversals as dramatic as the overturning of the common view that John is the most Greek of the gospels by the view that it is the most Jewish of them. Such an upending of received opinion is partly, of course, the result of the excitement occasioned by the sudden appearance of a whole body of Palestinian Jewish literature that no one had even dreamed of.[3] It is also a result of the fact that John's Gospel is not really like anything else. Beyond these general considerations, the hypothesis of Philonic influence was vulnerable because its supporters had not succeeded in demonstrating much *specific* affinity between the writings of Philo and the Gospel of John. The argument rested mainly on perceived similarities between the Logos in Philo and the Logos in the prologue of the gospel, and despite Dodd's lengthy exposition of the Philonic-Logos coloring in John's portrayal of Jesus' activities and claims, many critics have stopped short because of the noticeable absence of Logos in the technical sense anywhere in the gospel besides the prologue. The skeptic might well ask, and in effect many have asked, for *specific* demonstration of the Lakes' assertion that "the gospel is extremely Philonic."[4]

It is the purpose of this article to investigate one passage of major theological importance, Jesus' analysis of his own relationship to Abraham (John 8:56-58), and to show that Philo provides essential background for understanding this passage. We believe that once this background

is made clear, the enigmas of the passage, which have taxed the ingenuity of modern scholars and ancient scribes, evaporate. We do not claim that the evangelist knew the writings of Philo; along with Sanday, we "find it hard to think of him as sitting down to a deliberate study of the Jewish scholar's voluminous treatises."[5] We are not even directly challenging the dictum of F.-M. Braun, that if Philo had never existed the Fourth Gospel would most probably not have been different from what it is.[6] We are saying, however, that this particular passage would be different from what it is had there not been accessible to the author of the gospel a mode of thought characteristically Alexandrian-Hellenistic-Jewish, a mode of thought which is not identical with that of Qumran or the rabbis, even granted that those traditions were themselves to some extent inevitably Hellenized by the beginning of the Christian era. And we are saying that in this instance, at least, the most economical source theory would point to the writings of Philo. There is of course always the possibility that Philo is simply reflecting a tradition on which the evangelist also drew.

The Passage

The passage with which we are concerned is the following:

> Ἀβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἠγαλλιάσατο ἵνα ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμήν· καὶ εἶδε καὶ ἐχάρη. εἶπον οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι πρὸς αὐτόν, Πεντήκοντα ἔτη οὔπω ἔχεις, καὶ Ἀβραὰμ ἑώρακας; εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι, ἐγώ εἰμι.

There is one particularly significant variant reading, attested by Bodmer Papyrus 15 (P^{75}), the original hand of Codex Sinaiticus, Gregory's MS 0124 (Paris, 9th cent.), and both the Sahidic and Bohairic Coptic: instead of ἑώρακας; they read ἑώρακέν σε; Westcott and Hort designated this a reading of approximately equal validity with the other. Their position is thus midway between that of J. H. Bernard

on the one hand, who says that "the true reading seems to be" the variant, and C. K. Barrett and Bultmann on the other hand, both of whom call it "a correction," the former "doubtless" and the latter "certainly."[7] We think our analysis tips the balance in favor of Bernard's judgment. This is largely because the LXX of Gen 17:1 reads, "The Lord was seen of Abraham." Since on the one hand Jesus is often referred to as "Lord" in John, and on the other hand it is Philo's commentary on Genesis 17 which we believe lies back of the passage in John, we find a presumption in favor of the alternate reading.

The context of the passage is typically Johannine. The dialogue between Jesus and his hearers is a dialectic of escalating divine claims and recurrent misapprehension. There is a puzzling anomaly, however, in that the whole interchange is introduced as a discussion between Jesus and *Jews who believed him* (8:31: ἔλεγεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους). Since only a few verses later (8:37) these same hearers are said to wish to kill Jesus, commentators who want to preserve the unequivocal distinction in John between believers and non-believers have had recourse either to an alleged difference in meaning between the weaker dative construction πιστεύειν τινί and the stronger πιστεύειν εἰς τινα, or to the ever-convenient hypotheses of editorial inattention or textual dislocation.[8] Surely it is better to try to make sense of the text as it stands, even at the cost of some revision of our estimate of John's categories, than to depend on various expedients, however ingenious they may be.

Christians and Jews

We might in fact be able to detect some historical background for this interchange between Jesus and his audience. Leaving aside the question of the historicity of this (or any other) particular episode, and without arguing for or against connections between the thought of

John and that of Paul, we can notice that the role assigned to Abraham in this dialogue is reminiscent of the central place he takes in Paul's argument for the antiquity of Christianity. Perhaps Jesus' audience at this point in John's Gospel reflects the condition of Jews who were initially attracted to the Christian message by its appeal to the first of the patriarchs, but who then rejected it because of the Christian claim to do more than restore those golden days. Up to the point that they were persuaded, on the basis of the apostolic preaching, that Jesus had overcome history by a restoration of the religion of Abraham, the Jews believed him, but when it became clear that the exaltation of Abraham was merely a foil *ad majorem Jesu Christi gloriam*, they drew back.

The dialogue in John 8:31-59 may be a dramatic and highly compressed summary of a complex historical process by which Jews who were initially attracted to the Christian "Reformation" of Judaism gradually became aware of the movement's implications. We believe that the Johannine conclusion drawn from the kind of exegesis and theological speculation represented by Philo played a part in that historical process. Be that as it may, we see no reason for taking 8:31-59 otherwise than as a coherent section, from the structure and argument of which we can learn something, not about the chaotic conditions of Johannine compilation, edition, and redaction, but about the thought and message of the evangelist.

Traditional Interpretations

One reason the passage about Abraham's having seen Jesus' day has puzzled and tantalized interpreters is that John does not make clear just what episode (if any) in Abraham's career Jesus is referring to. At another place in the gospel (12:37-41) the evangelist himself says that the failure of the people to believe in Jesus (εἰς αὐτόν) was a fulfillment of the inaugural vision of Isaiah, who

said what he did "because he saw his glory and spoke concerning him" (ταῦτα εἶπεν Ἡσαΐας, ὅτι εἶδε τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐλάλησε περὶ αὐτοῦ). John's interpretation here is facilitated by Isaiah's use of κύριος, so that language addressed originally to Yahweh can easily be referred to Christ. For our purposes, however, what is important is the fact that in this instance Isaiah's sight (he *saw* his glory) is quite explicitly a prophetic vision ("I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple," Isa 6:1), and the voice Isaiah heard on that occasion was foretelling things to come.

With an eye on this clear example of prophetic vision in John, many commentators have assumed that Abraham is being treated in chap. 8 as a prophet, and that in his role as prophet he was granted a vision of the way things would be at the time the Messiah came. There are rabbinic materials by the end of the first century C.E. which support the view that Abraham was a seer, but none incontrovertibly asserts that Abraham saw the Messiah. The rabbinic interpretation grew out of a literal rendering of the Hebrew expression "he went into the days" (Gen 24:1), which is simply an idiom for "he grew old." GenR 44:22 records a controversy between Rabbi Johanan b. Zakkai and Rabbi Akiba concerning Gen 15:18: the former held that God revealed to Abraham this world but not the next; the latter maintained that God revealed to Abraham both this world and the next.[9] Scholars have had to postulate that "if he were shown the age to come this would include the days of the Messiah."[10] If this account of a divine favor granted to Abraham is what lies behind John 8:56-58, then we have here in John's Gospel important evidence for the antiquity of a tradition that Abraham had a vision of the Messiah. However, there is serious risk of circular argument here. The crucial omission of specific reference to the Messiah in *Genesis Rabbah* and other accounts of Abraham's vision

should cause us to hesitate before we accept this explanation.

What cannot be got round about our text is its straightforward declaration that Abraham *saw* the day. The *hina* clause following "he rejoiced" can be stretched to some kind of conditional ("He rejoiced that he was to see," so RSV), or ἠγαλλιάσατο ἵνα ἴδῃ can perhaps be made to mean "longed to see" or "desired to see." But if one were simply reading the text, the *hina* clause would be one of explanation, giving the grounds for the rejoicing: "He rejoiced to see my day."[11] And in any case, what follows undercuts all the grammatical subterfuges, including the appeals to a hypothetical misread Aramaic original, that scholars have proposed: "He saw and was glad." The tense is aorist, not perfect, making it difficult to support the view that Abraham from Sheol (or wherever) was currently witnessing the days of the Messiah.[12] Indeed, καὶ εἶδε καὶ ἐχάρη might be designed precisely to cut short any suspicion that the preceding construction should be read in a conditional sense.

Which Aramaic Original?

The proponents of an Aramaic original for the Gospel of John, for whose whole argument the allegation of clear evidence of mistranslation is crucial, have devoted much attention to this passage. Torrey sharply criticizes his ally C. F. Burney for attempting to make ἠγαλλιάσατο a mistranslation of an Aramaic verb meaning "to long"--"The verb which Burney supposes here is not known to have occurred in Western Aramaic"--and then goes on to his own analysis which begins with the confident assertion, "'Abraham rejoiced (ἠγαλλιάσατο) to see my day, and he saw it, and rejoiced' is a tautology that cannot have been in the original. What we should suppose the author to have written is 'Abraham *desired*, or *prayed*, to see my day.'" Torrey then proposes an Aramaic original in which the omission

of an *aleph* immediately preceding another one would give rise to the "mistake."[13]

We might ask, however, what are the grounds for determining that the tautology "cannot have been in the original." There is a parallelism in the construction which is the single most characteristic feature of Semitic poetry, and by calling a case of parallelism a "tautology" Torrey has prejudged the question by his choice of terminology.[14]

J. De Zwaan, in a review of Torrey's book, offers yet another reason why ἠγαλλιάσατο is a mistake--"Abraham did *not* see the days of our Lord and obviously he did not know about them"--and another hypothetical Aramaic original, in which a final *daleth* was misread as a *yodh*, and what John *actually* wrote should have been translated Ἀβραὰμ ὤξυνε (sc. τὸν νοῦν αὐτοῦ) ἵνα εἰδῇ τὴν ἡμέραν: "Abraham our father sharpened his mind in order to know my day, and he saw and was glad."[15]

In assessing arguments for an Aramaic original of John's Gospel, R. E. Brown, in an excess of understatement, notes that "there is always an element of subjectivity in deciding that the Greek makes no sense as it now stands."[16] The various "misread Aramaic originals" that have been proposed for our particular text are not important in themselves for our argument, but they are worth calling to mind because they focus attention on the difficulty interpreters have had making sense of the Greek "as it now stands." What is the *meaning* of Jesus' declaration that Abraham *saw* his day?

God's Promise of Isaac

If one is unwilling to have recourse to an extra-biblical tradition about Abraham's being granted a special prophetic vision of the entire future, or about Abraham, in Sheol, keeping abreast of the latest developments on earth, one must look for an episode in Genesis to which Jesus might

be referring. Attention focuses most often on Abraham's reaction to the news that he and Sarah are going to have a son (Gen 17:17 LXX: καὶ ἔπεσεν Ἀβραὰμ ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐγέλασε). In all likelihood this is laughter of incredulity, but in Philo, as we shall see below, it is interpreted as laughter of rejoicing, and the verb χαίρειν and the noun χαρά are used repeatedly. The terminology and conceptual framework of Philo's *De mutatione nominum* are critical for the interpretation of the Johannine passage, but for now it is sufficient to point out that there was current in the first century C.E. a treatment of Genesis 17 favorable to the pious propriety of the laughter of both Abraham and Sarah. And in any case, if one were asked to guess when it was that Abraham rejoiced most, one would almost certainly say it was at the moment he learned that he was to have a son by his wife.

Yet, once this answer is proposed to the question, What is Jesus referring to?, the central question of interpretation confronts us: In what sense was the announcement of the birth of Isaac equivalent to the day of Christ? If we can answer that question, then Brown's problem with ἠγαλλιάσατο and ἐχάρη ("It is strange that the first verb is stronger than the second, for we would expect the fulfillment to be stronger than the prospect") would disappear, since what Abraham rejoiced at and was glad about would be both promise and fulfillment simultaneously.[17] Can we demonstrate that something about the announcement of the birth of Isaac springs the temporal trap?

It is not easy to find a persuasive answer, but the Jews' reply to Jesus in the variant reading implies that they assumed Jesus meant to say that Abraham had seen his day, not that he, Jesus, had seen Abraham. The received text, which has them asking how Jesus, not yet fifty, can have seen Abraham, is based on a misapprehension of what Jesus has just said ("*Abraham* saw"), although that in itself would not militate against the authenticity of the

received reading, since in John's Gospel "the Jews" nearly always fail to get the point. However, in this case the claim of Jesus that Abraham had seen his day is itself so startling that we might expect the Jews' question to grow directly out of his assertion; it is enough of an enigma in itself.

The Problem

A complete exegesis of John 8:56-58 must do the following:

1. Identify the event to which Jesus is referring.
2. Tie the statement "Abraham rejoiced" directly to the event.
3. Explain why Jesus asserts that Abraham has seen his day.
4. Explain why Jesus utters the words, "Before Abraham was I am."

Traditional interpretations first attempt to explain No. 3, and they have plausible explanations for Jesus' claim: Abraham is a prophet and has a vision of the Messiah, or Abraham greets the Messiah from Sheol. In addition, they have some independent support for these proposals. There is, as we have seen, evidence from a later period that some in NT times may have believed these statements about Abraham. However, in order to deal with Nos. 1 and 2, traditional interpretations must resort to suppositions. They cannot identify the event in any biography of Abraham, but must suppose such an event to have taken place. They must suppose either that Abraham had a vision or that he did see the Messiah from afar in Sheol. In addition, they must suppose that had Abraham seen the Messiah, he would have rejoiced. This second supposition is not without some foundation: if Abraham is the man of faith, we would expect him to rejoice in such circumstances. However, a plausible supposition is still a supposition. Moreover, the resort to the rabbinic tradition concerning the Patriarchs in Sheol encourages resort to another supposition,

the Aramaic original. Finally, the traditional interpretations make no attempt to explain why Jesus says "Before Abraham was I am" in the context of the passage. The structural weaknesses of these interpretations are obvious.

Our exegesis, rather than beginning with No. 3, will first seek to identify the event. In what follows we shall show that no additional suppositions need be made if the event is God's promise of Isaac to Abraham according to Philo's exegesis of Genesis 17 in *De mutatione nominum*.

1. The event is located in a biography of Abraham.
2. According to Philo's account of the promise, Abraham rejoiced.
3. According to Philo, Abraham had had a previous vision of the Logos and a summary of that vision is inserted in such a way as to identify the Logos with the heavenly messenger.
4. According to Philo, the covenant extended to Abraham in this event is the same covenant extended to Moses at the Burning Bush and is encapsulated in the words *Egō eimi* ("I am").

Philo's Account of God's Promise that Abraham Will Have a Son

Philo begins his exegesis with the verse, "Abraham became ninety-nine years old and the Lord was seen by Abraham and said to him, 'I am thy God.'"[18] After a brief discussion of the symbolism of "ninety-nine," Philo adds:

> Do not suppose that the Existent which truly exists is comprehended by any man; for we have no means by which we can represent it, neither in sense, for it is not perceptible by sense, nor yet in the intellect. (Mut 7 [*PLCL* 5.145])

Philo goes on to explain that if God is incomprehensible, then he can have no proper name.

> It is a logical consequence that no personal name can be properly assigned to the truly Existent. Note that when the prophet desires to know what he must answer to those who ask His name He says "I am He that is" (Ex. iii. 14), which is equivalent to "My nature is to be, not to be spoken." (Mut 11 [*PLCL* 5.147])

Applying this conclusion to the text in question, Philo concludes:

> And so the words "The Lord was seen of Abraham" must not be understood in the sense that the Cause of All shone upon him and appeared to him, for what human mind could contain the vastness of that vision? Rather we must think of it as a manifestation of one of the Potencies which attend him, the Potency of Kingship, for the title Lord betokens sovereignty and kingship. (Mut 15 [*PLCL* 5.151])

Parallel with Moses at the Burning Bush

From what has been said, one would expect Philo to hold that at the Burning Bush Moses did not have a vision of God himself, but of some being which lay below the Cause of All. And this Philo affirms.

> In the midst of the flame was a form of the fairest beauty, unlike any visible object, an image supremely divine in appearance, refulgent with a light brighter than the light of fire. It might be supposed that this was an image of Him that Is; but let us rather call it an angel or herald, since, with a silence that spoke more clearly than speech, it employed as it were the miracle of sight to herald future events. (Vita Mos 1.66 [*PLCL* 6.311])

And then Philo adds (1.67): "The angel was a symbol of God's providence," i.e., a symbol of his Kingly Potency (cf. Spec Leg 1.209).

Thus far there is a close parallel between the vision of Moses and the vision of Abraham. However, the fact that Philo's main point in both of these accounts is that the Existent cannot be represented visually and that therefore the messenger must be some lesser being may explain an anomaly in the account of Abraham's vision. After having suggested that we think of the figure as the Kingly Potency, Philo immediately inserts a short passage which is a summary of a vision of the Logos Abraham had when he left Ur and began his migration to Canaan.

> While our mind pursued the airy speculations of the Chaldeans it ascribed to the world powers of action which it regarded as causes. But when it migrated from the Chaldean creed it recognized that the world had for its charioteer and pilot a Ruler Whose sovereignty was presented to it in vision. And therefore the words are "The Lord (not "The Existent") was seen of him." (Mut 16-17 [*PLCL* 5.151])

The passages continue as if either the Kingly Potency or the Logos was being glimpsed.

In what follows we shall demonstrate conclusively that this short passage is indeed a summary account of Abraham's earlier vision of the Logos. We shall also argue that since the passage supports equally well the conclusions that the messenger was the Kingly Potency or the Logos, the exegete is free to take the passage either way. However, before we do so, it will be helpful to address the ambiguity with which Philo presents his interpreters. Why does he not make himself crystal clear? We believe that it is because Philo is willing to entertain simultaneously two quite different interpretations of the same event. Since his main point is that some being below the Existent One is glimpsed, it does not make any great difference whether one says it is the Kingly Potency, or the Logos. A good example of Philo's readiness to give two quite different interpretations to the same material where his basic doctrine is not an issue, is conveniently given in the next section of *De mutatione nominum* where Philo continues, "But the Sovereign when manifested confers a still higher gift on him who sees and hears him. He says, 'I am thy God'" (Mut 18 [*PLCL* 5.153]).

The Meaning of "God"

This last quotation implies that the Sovereign Potency or the Logos is properly called "God." This claim is so astounding when made by a Jew that we must linger over it.

About "God" Philo says two quite contradictory things. In some passages he holds that the title "God" cannot

properly be applied to the Existent; rather, the title belongs to one of the Potencies and is used only metaphorically of the Father of All. In other passages he argues that the term "the God" applies properly to *To On*, and less properly to the Potencies.

For example, in Mut 27, Philo says:

> We should remember this also that the words "I am thy God" are used by licence of language and not in their proper sense, for the Existent considered as existent is not relative. (*PLCL* 5.157)

What Philo means by "the Existent not being relative" is that *To On* is in itself the Absolute. In its self-existence it is incapable of receiving relational predicates. "He cannot change or alter and needs nothing else at all, so that all things are his, but He himself in the proper sense belongs to none" (Mut 28 [*PLCL* 5.157]). Since the Existent is by nature immutable, no predicates which relate him to the changing world can properly be applied to him. He cannot properly be called "Creator," "Sovereign," or "Redeemer." It is only the Potencies to whom relational predicates are properly applied (Mut 28). Now the word "God" is a synonym for "Creator." According to Philo, θεός is derived from τίθημι, "to make" (Conf 137). "God" as a title therefore belongs primarily to the Creative Potency, "because through this the Father who is its begetter and contriver made the universe, so that 'I am thy God' is equivalent to 'I am the Maker and Artificer'" (Mut 29 [*PLCL* 5.159]). Thus according to the doctrine in *De mutatione nominum*, the title "God" does not belong properly to *To On*, but rather to the Creative Potency.

However, there are passages in which "God," or at least "the God," is taken to be the proper title of the Existent. For example, in *De somniis*, commenting on the place name "Bethel" in Gen 31:13 and following the LXX, Philo reads the verse as follows: "I am the God who appeared to thee in the place of God (ἐν τόπῳ θεοῦ)." He understands

this text to mean "I am the God who appeared to thee instead of God."[19] This reading certainly does violence to the Hebrew, and might be taken to suggest that Philo's acquaintance with the Hebrew text was scant. However, this need not have been the case. Philo seems to be following one of his rules of exegesis, one to which he is deeply committed. Since the Scriptures cannot err, a passage cannot be taken in its natural sense, but must be taken in some other, if the natural sense will do violence to the truth. What concerns Philo about the place name "Bethel" is that God is incorporeal and hence cannot appear in a place (Somn 1.182-88). Since to affirm that he does appear in a place would make the Scriptures false, some other interpretation must be found. As confirmation of Philo's practice we might note also that he says the verse, "and Cain went out from the face of God" (Gen 4:16), is to be taken in a figurative sense, for "the impression made by the words in their literal sense is greatly at variance with truth" (Post 1 [*PLCL* 2.329]).

With this bit of exegesis Philo has a biblical text to support him in his claim that "God" sometimes refers to the Existent, and sometimes to one of his Potencies. From what has been said above, we would expect Philo to read the text thus: "I am the God (i.e., one of the Potencies) who appeared to thee in the place of God (i.e., the Existent)." Sometimes he does read the text this way: for example, when he speaks of the angel who appeared to Jacob in the house of Laban and instructed Jacob in the technique of causing spotted sheep to be born (Somn 1.189). However, further on in the same treatise Philo gives a quite different account of this text. In this second passage, "the God" in "I am the God" refers not to a Potency, but to the Existent, and "God" in "in the place of God" refers to the Logos (Somn 1.228-30). Thus Philo takes the text both ways. Sometimes a Potency, properly titled "God," appears in the place of the Existent, and sometimes "the God" appears in the place of one of his Potencies.

The Three Men at Mamre

Before we try to sort out Philo's doctrine on hierophanies, we ought to get all the complexities before us. In Genesis 18 three men appear to Abraham and announce a second time the coming birth of Isaac. Philo's treatment of the three men is instructive. Here we get a different account, not only of Abraham's vision, but of divine visions in general. The passage is important enough to quote at length.

> Here we may leave the literal exposition and begin the allegorical. Spoken words contain symbols of things apprehended by the understanding only. When, then, as at noon-tide God shines around the soul, and the light of the mind fills it through and through and the shadows are driven from it by the rays which pour all around it, the single object presents to it a triple vision, one representing the reality, the other two the shadows reflected from it. Our life in the light which our senses perceive gives us a somewhat similar experience, for objects standing or moving often cast two shadows at once. No one, however, should think that the shadows can be properly spoken of as God. To call them so is loose speaking, serving merely to give a clearer view of the fact which we are explaining, since the real truth is otherwise. Rather, as anyone who has approached nearest to the truth would say, the central place is held by the Father of the Universe, who in the sacred scriptures is called He that Is as his proper name, while on either side of him are the senior Potencies, the nearest to him, the Creative and the Kingly. The title of the former is God, since it made and ordered the All; the title of the latter is Lord, since it is the fundamental right of the maker to rule and control what he has brought into being. So the central Being with each of his Potencies as his squire presents to the mind which has vision the appearance sometimes of one, sometimes of three. (Abr 119-22 [*PLCL* 6.63, 65])

Philo goes on to note that to perceive the Existent alone is the highest grace, but that to perceive him through his actions or his Potencies is a divinely approved "second best voyage" (Abr 123 [*PLCL* 6.65]).

The Coherence of Philo's Conception

Were one to attempt to summarize in one account the variety of views found in these various passages concerning hierophanies, one would soon find that account filled with ambiguities. In *De mutatione nominum* the divine incomprehensibility and transcendence are stated in fairly stark terms. The Existent neither appears nor speaks to Abraham. In *De vita Mosis* God does not appear to Moses, but he speaks to him. *De somniis* affirms that *To On* can appear directly to the initiate. In the treatise *De Abrahamo* a like doctrine is found, but the context makes it clear that Abraham is not at the stage of spiritual development which allows him to see the three as one. This latter passage gives the key to the coherence of Philo's conception. As he so often says, the Scriptures are written for our instruction. They are a collection of books designed for different kinds of men at varying stages of spiritual development, and they are about men at these different stages.[20] It is not surprising, therefore, that Philo should interpret these same Scriptures with this principle in mind. This observation leads us to make a very important distinction in Philo's thought. Appearance does not always faithfully mirror reality. We should not expect the true nature of things, the true ontology, to be always faithfully reflected in human vision and understanding. We must keep distinct *what is* from *how it appears* to men.

The True Ontology

It is clear from Philo's discussion of the appearance of the three men on the plains of Mamre that those at the highest stage of development will see the three as one. They will not only see the Existent as manifested in his Potencies, but they will also see the Potencies as one in *To On*. Those at the highest stage will see the true nature of things, the unity of the three, while those at a lower

stage will see the three and then perhaps only by an act of the intellect come to appreciate their unity. While they are in fact three in one, not everyone will directly have a vision of the unity.

One of the lesser visions to which men may aspire is a vision of the Logos.

> It well befits those who have entered into comradeship of knowledge to see the Existent if they may, but, if they cannot, to see at any rate His image, the most holy Logos, and next to that the most perfect work of all that our senses know, namely, the world. (Conf 97)

According to Philo, the Logos is the first emanation from the Existent, his Image, his Firstborn, and his Vicegerent. From him flow the Creative and Kingly Potencies.[21] Hence the hierophant will be able to detect the presence of the Logos whenever he detects the presence of the Regal or Creative Potencies. Philo makes this claim for himself.

> But there is a higher thought than these. It comes from a voice in my own soul, which oftentimes is God-possessed and divines where it does not know. This thought I will record in words if I can. The voice told me that while God exists ontologically after the analogy of the One, he is yet two with respect to his highest and first Powers, Goodness and Authority; by Goodness he begat the universe, and by Authority he rules what he has begotten. And there is a third thing which, being in between them, brings the two together, his Logos, for by Logos God is both ruler and good....The Logos was conceived in God's mind before all things and is manifest in connection with all things. (Cher 27-28 [*PLCL* 2.25])[22]

What this passage teaches us is that, according to Philo's ontological doctrine, when the Ruling and the Creative Powers are present, the Logos is also present. Furthermore, in *De Abrahamo* Philo makes it clear that Abraham had a vision of the Logos such as to confirm the message given Philo himself from the voice of his own soul.

Abraham's Vision of the Logos

Before we can appreciate the account of Abraham's vision of the Logos, we must look first at another passage in which Philo speaks of the separability of the Regal and Creative Powers and this Chiefest of all Beings. Commenting upon the symbolism of the Ark, Philo says,

> ...the Laws laid up in the Ark [are] symbols of injunction and prohibition; the lid of the Ark, which he calls the Mercy-seat, [represents] the gracious power; while the Creative and Kingly Powers are represented by the winged Cherubim that rest upon it. The Divine Logos, who is high above all these, has not been visibly portrayed, being like to no one of the objects of sense. Nay, he is himself the Image of God, Chiefest of all Beings intellectually perceived, placed nearest, with no intervening distance, to the Alone truly Existent One. For we read: "I will talk with thee from above the Mercy-seat, between the two Cherubim," words which show that while the Logos is the charioteer of the Powers, he who talks is seated in the chariot, giving directions to the charioteer for the right wielding of the reins of the Universe. (Fuga 100-101 [*PLCL* 5.65])

This passage not only confirms the presence of the Logos with the two Powers, but it also identifies the Logos as the charioteer. This same identification appears in Philo's account of Abraham's vision of the Logos.

According to Philo, Abraham first followed a creed of sense perception.

> In this creed Abraham had been reared, and for a long time remained a Chaldean. Then opening the soul's eye as though after profound sleep, and beginning to see the pure beam instead of the deep darkness, he followed the ray and discerned what he had not beheld before, a charioteer and pilot presiding over the world and directing in safety his own work, assuming the charge and superintendence of that work and of all such parts of it as are worthy of the divine care. And so to establish more firmly in his understanding the sight which had been revealed to him, the Holy Logos follows it up by saying to him, "Friend, the great is often known by its outlines as shown in the smaller, and by looking at them the observer finds

> the scope of his vision infinitely enlarged. Dismiss, then, the rangers of the heavens and the science of Chaldea, and depart for a short time from the greatest of cities, this world, to the lesser, and thus you will be better able to apprehend the Overseer of the All." (Abr 70-71 [*PLCL* 6.41])

Can there be any doubt that the description of the messenger in *De mutatione nominum* is but a summary of Abraham's earlier vision of the Logos?

> While our mind pursued the airy speculations of the Chaldeans it ascribed to the world powers of action which it regarded as causes. But when it migrated from the Chaldean creed it recognized that the world had for its charioteer and pilot a Ruler Whose sovereignty was presented to it in vision. And therefore the words are "The Lord (not "The Existent") was seen of him." (Mut 16-17 [*PLCL* 5.151])

Whatever the reasons for Philo's hesitation in making himself clear in *De mutatione nominum*, surely the Philo exegete has good grounds for concluding that the heavenly messenger is indeed the Logos, the First Born of the Father of All.

Abraham and Sarah Receive the News with Joy

The natural reading of Genesis 17 is that Sarah and Abraham greeted the prophecy with unbelief and laughed at the improbability of the projected event. However, by ancient tradition the laughter was interpreted to be an expression of spontaneous joy.[23] Philo is clearly a part of this tradition. He speaks of Abraham's laughter as "the joy which befits the virtuous alone" (Mut 175 [*PLCL* 5.233]). Sarah's laughter is also a laughter of joy, for when she laughed she said within herself, according to Philo, "'Not yet has this befallen me til now,' this unstudied, self-sprung good. Yet he that promised, she says, is 'my Lord' and 'older' than all creation, and I needs must believe him" (Mut 166 [*PLCL* 5.227]).[24]

This interpretation of the laughter, so strange to us, need not have seemed strange to Philo. Where the Masoretic Text of Gen 18:12 reads: "After I am waxed old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?," the LXX reads as above, "Not yet has this befallen me till now," thus barely supporting the notion that the laughter was of joy. In the case of Abraham, the Genesis story declares: "And Abraham believed in God and it was counted to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:6 LXX). Hence there is some slight pressure in the text to discount expressions of disbelief on the part of Abraham. Finally, Philo takes the name "Isaac" itself to mean "laughter." For Philo, to say "the Lord made laughter for me" is the same as to say "he formed, he wrought, he begot Isaac" (Mut 137 [*PLCL* 5.213]; cf. Mut 131, 157).

Abraham and Sarah, then, rejoiced at the announcement of the birth of Isaac. But they also rejoiced at the presence of the heavenly messenger. Embedded in the discussion of the promise of a son is a commentary on the text of Exod 4:14: "Seeing thee, he will rejoice at it." Here Philo speaks of the joy which virtue brings to the upright man. But he also speaks of the joy which even those who are not virtuous have in the presence of the worthy man.

> For, see, we find in Moses the primary authority for this wise doctrine, since he pictures the good man as rejoicing and laughing, and elsewhere not the good man only but those also who come into company with him. "Seeing thee," he says, "he will rejoice at it." He suggests that the mere sight of the worthy [man? being?] is enough to make the mind cast off the soul's most hateful burden, grief, and to fill it with joy. (Mut 167-68 [*PLCL* 5.229]).

Since this passage is embedded in the discussion of the joy of Abraham and Sarah at the divine promise, it seems plausible to take it that Philo also means to say that Abraham and Sarah rejoiced at the presence of the heavenly messenger.

The Words of the Covenant, Egō eimi

Having shown that in Philo's account of the divine appearance to Abraham, there is good reason to believe that Abraham sees the Logos, and having shown that Abraham rejoices, not only at the divine promise, but also at the presence of the heavenly messengers, we are now in a position to consider Philo's understanding of the words *Egō eimi*. Philo connects these words with the gift of the covenant.

> "And I," he says, "--see, my covenant is with thee." The meaning suggested is to this purport--there are very many kinds of covenant, assuring bounties and gifts to the worthy, but the highest form of covenant is "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι). He shows and points to himself, as far as he can be shown who is above all showing, by the words "And I," and adds, "behold my covenant," the beginning and the fountain of all bounties is "I am." (Mut 57-58 [*PLCL* 5.171, 173])

These words show Philo to be a forerunner of Martin Buber, who insisted that the promise of the continuing presence of God is an integral part of the sacred and mysterious divine Name. However, for Philo the words *Egō eimi to on* and the isolated *Egō eimi* carry with them also the notion of pre-existence. The sacred Name affirms that true existence, i.e., immutability, belongs only to him whose proper name is "I am He who Is."[25] Here, in Mut 57, immediately preceding the explication of the covenant with Abraham as the highest form of covenant, Philo also connects *Egō eimi* with pre-existence.

> The frame of mind which shrank from him and fell spontaneously won God's high approval by thus acknowledging of the Existent (τοῦ ὄντος) that it is he alone who stands and that all below him are subject to change and mutation of every kind. (*PLCL* 5.171)

Thus the covenant given Abraham, like the covenant given Moses, is of the highest kind in that the words "I am He who Is" are either spoken or implied. The words *Egō eimi*,

when spoken in such contexts, are for Philo very special and carry with them all of the freight of the whole *Egō eimi To On*.

Summary of Philo's Commentary on Genesis 17

In concluding this section, we can say that Philo's exegesis of Genesis 17 amply supports the identification of the heavenly messenger with the Logos and that Abraham and Sarah rejoiced both to hear the promise of Isaac and also at the presence of the bearer of this good news. During these events, the messenger offered Abraham, like Moses, the highest form of covenant, the *Egō eimi*. In the context, these sacred words affirm both presence and pre-existence.

A Brief Look at Similar Proposals

Before we bring our analysis of the Johannine passage to high-resolution focus, we need to consider in some detail attempts made by other scholars to find connections between the passage and Philo. We believe that while these others have been looking in the right direction, they have not assembled the collection of pieces of evidence that are needed to solve the puzzle.

One interpretation would make Isaac himself an incarnation of the Logos. This notion seems to peer tantalizingly through an elliptical footnote to the passage in *The Jerusalem Bible* (Jesus "is Isaac according to the spirit"). The editors perhaps found the grounding for their view in the writings of E. R. Goodenough.

Goodenough claims that according to Philo's allegory Isaac is one of the incarnations of the Logos. Hence Abraham's joy at Isaac's birth is really a welcoming of the Logos into the world. Someone who could say "And the Logos became flesh" and mean it fairly literally would interpret these doctrines of Philo in a fairly literal sense as well.

Goodenough's support for the view that Isaac is the Logos is a passage in Mut 131. The following quotation from Goodenough contains his translation.

> It was "the Lord who begat Isaac," and as a result Isaac was not "a human being, but...the unprojected son of God who gives him to souls that are entirely devoted to peace as a soothing and comforting presence."[26]

To be sure, "unprojected son of God" sounds like the Logos. However, the difficulty lies in the translation of this phrase. If we follow Wendland and Mangey, as does Goodenough, the passage is punctuated as follows: γέλως, ὁ ἐνδιάθετος υἱὸς θεοῦ.[27] The problem is that ἐνδιάθετος in its usual sense is the opposite of προφορικός. Hence it means "internal," that is, "unprojected" only in the sense of "not externalized."[28] This fits the context better. For here Philo is speaking of joy, for "Isaac" means "laughter." The full passage is better translated thus:

> First, then, the giver of anything in the proper sense of the word must give something which belongs to himself, and if this is so, Isaac must be not the man Isaac but Isaac whose name is that of the best of the good emotions, joy, laughter, which is an internal son of God, who gives him as a means to soothe and cheer truly peaceful souls. (Mut 131 [*PLCL* 5.209])

If this is the correct translation, the only way a case can be made for supposing that John 8:56-58 echoes a tradition traceable to Philo--that Isaac is an earlier manifestation of the Logos--is to assume either that the evangelist was quite incapable of understanding Philo's meaning here, or that he received the Philonic speculations in a very garbled form.

Another line of explanation, touched on very briefly by A. W. Argyle, develops out of the fluidity between *logos* and *logoi* in Philo. According to Argyle's account of Philo, the promise was given to Abraham at the oak of Mamre by *logoi* or the Logos.[29] From the little he says it is clear

that Argyle takes the three angels to be *logoi* and the *logoi* in fact to be the Logos. Argyle does not cite his sources for this view, but detailed arguments along these lines are presented in two nineteenth-century works, those of J. Drummond and A. Gfrörer.[30] When subjected to scrutiny, their arguments are found to be inconclusive.

Both Drummond and Gfrörer note that Philo often uses "angel" and *logos* (collectively "angels" and *logoi*) interchangeably. The documentation, particularly by Drummond, is extensive on this point.[31] However, they reach somewhat different conclusions as to what this interchange means. Gfrörer takes Philo to mean that each angel is in fact a manifestation of the Logos. Drummond thinks that Philo really did not believe in angels at all, but that "angels" merely represent the *logoi* allegorically. In turn he takes *logoi* to mean bits and pieces of God's wisdom: ideas, natural laws, rules of right reason, etc. On the issue of the reality of the angels, Gfrörer is certainly correct. Wolfson proves that Philo thought of the angels as real beings, and that their appearances were taken by Philo to be real although they were also to be interpreted allegorically.[32] For our purposes Wolfson makes his point particularly telling because he makes it by reference to the appearance of the three angels to Abraham.

Thus far Argyle seems to be on the right track. Angels are also called *logoi*, and real angels appear to Abraham. But how can we conclude that the *logoi* are really the Logos? On this issue Drummond and Gfrörer agree. Taking as normative Philo's description of the Logos as the "idea of ideas,"[33] they conclude that the relationship is one of Platonic participation. In Drummond's words, the unity between the Logos and all other powers "must be found in the highest genus, which may be predicated of every lower term."[34] Thus the *logoi* participate in the Logos, and it is present wherever they are present.

Of course if Drummond's and Gfrörer's thesis is correct, at best it shows only that according to Philo, if angels are present, then the Logos is present. However, it does not show that Abraham knew the Logos to be present.

However, there are serious difficulties with this interpretation of Philo's thought. Granting that Philo interchanged "angels" and *logoi*, it is not at all clear that we ought to draw Drummond's and Gfrörer's conclusions. Does Philo mean that the *logoi* are angels, or does he mean that the angels are *logoi*? This issue is especially important since on all accounts Philo uses *logos* in many ways: to refer to the mind of God, to truths of reason, to the minds of men, to the rules of right reason, to reasons and words as well as to the First Creation of God, the being "through whom all things were made." Wolfson argues that although Philo sometimes calls *logoi*, taken as rules of right reason, etc., angels, he usually means only that angels are rational souls.[35] Thus angels are *logoi* in no other sense than each one of us is a *logos*, i.e., we have rational souls. Since Philo describes rational souls as "made in the image of God,"[36] or of his Chief Logos, it is not at all clear that he meant to affirm some sort of relation of Platonic participation between them and the Logos.

Still, it might be claimed that all rational souls are connected to the Logos by Platonic participation. However, it is exceedingly difficult to make a clear case for this notion. Philo describes the Logos in its second stage, i.e., as God's First Creature, as "the idea of ideas," as "the cause or source" of the two Powers, Sovereignty and Goodness, as the "totality" of the powers, as well as in other ways.[37] Various authorities have taken different descriptions to be primary: Drummond and Gfrörer, "the idea of ideas"; Wolfson, "the totality of the powers"; Goodenough, "cause or source" of the powers. While it may some day be possible to present a completely satisfactory account

of the relationship between the Logos as God's First Creation and the two Powers, Sovereignty and Goodness, it is best not to try to base an argument upon such a controversial matter. We have preferred to appeal to what Philo himself says that Abraham knew, and not to base our conclusions upon a special theory of the relationship of the Logos to its Powers, a theory which is bound to be the subject of debate.

Before we leave our consideration of these earlier interpreters we ought to look at one more of Gfrörer's arguments. While Gfrörer admits that Philo does not specifically mention the Logos in his account of the appearance of the three angels at Abraham's tent in *De Abrahamo*, he claims that Philo does specifically mention the Logos in connection with the same three angels in *De migratione Abrahami*.[38] The passage is important enough to quote at length.

> Now he that follows God has of necessity as his fellow-travellers the *logoi* which attend Him, angels as they are often called. What we read is that "Abraham travelled with them, joining with them in escorting them on their way" (Gen 18:16). What a glorious privilege to be put on a level with them! The escort is escorted; he gives what he was receiving; not one thing in return for another, but just one thing only that lies ready to be passed backwards and forwards from one to the other. For as long as he falls short of perfection, he has the divine Logos as his leader: since there is an oracle which says, "Lo, I send my messenger before thy face, to guard thee in thy way, that he may bring thee in into the land which I have prepared for thee...." (Migr 173-74 [*PLCL* 4.233])

The difficulty with relying upon this passage to support the contention that the Logos was present to Abraham when he walked and talked with the three angels is that the context shows Philo is here talking of the Logos in its first stage, as the Wisdom or Mind of God, and not in its second stage, as God's First Creature. As Drummond points out, the context makes clear that *logoi* here means "good advice"

or "sound directions."[39] It is better to translate it as "thoughts and words" of God, as in *PLCL*, than to imply, as does Gfrörer, that they are powers of the second stage Logos. Hence "the divine Logos" of the second half of the passage seems to refer to the first stage Logos, the Mind and Wisdom of God, rather than to the second stage Logos, the Chief of God's Powers.

Conclusion

These various earlier attempts to bring John 8:56-58 into conjunction with Philo have failed to persuade the skeptics because the crucial link with Abraham's *knowledge* was not forged. We believe we have demonstrated that according to Philo Abraham knew that the Logos was present when the birth of Isaac was announced, and that Jesus is declaring that when Abraham saw the Logos he was seeing the Logos who had now become flesh and was speaking.

There is, to be sure, a lingering problem with our interpretation. Jesus does not say that Abraham saw "me," but "my day." It is this which has sent exegetes hunting for a point in the lifetime of the incarnate Logos to which Jesus might be referring (birth, passion, resurrection, or the whole career taken as a unit), and which has seemed to many to require prophetic foresight or current interest from Sheol.

There can be no doubt that our interpretation would be easier to clinch if the text read "me" instead of "my day." However, we believe that other interpreters have been too rash in attempting to solve the puzzle of John 8:56-58 by first deciding upon the meaning of "my day" and then trying to explain the whole passage in terms of the meaning given these two words.

To be sure, the Old Testament has many reference to an eschatological "Day of the Lord," and some of these references are connected to the expectation of the Messiah. However, "day" has much too broad a range of applications in

ordinary usage to justify tying it so tightly to this one Old Testament use. For example, "day" is often associated with light as in "the light of day," or "it is day" when what is meant is "it is daylight." "Day" is also often associated with the sunrise, as in "the dawning of the day" or "day breaks." These other uses of "day" make us reluctant to decide that "my day" in this passage refers to "the Day of the Lord" in some specialized Old Testament sense. It is quite possible that "my day" in this passage in John means only "my light." This interpretation would then carry out the theme of the prologue and of many other parts of the gospel, that Christ is "the light of the world."

Philo, like John, makes a good deal of the symbol of light. The Logos is described variously as "Sun,"[40] "Light,"[41] and "Day"[42] is even ascribed to him as a title (Philo may here be a remote source for this same title used of Christ by the Church Fathers).[43] Philo also makes a great deal of the fact that the announcement of the birth of Isaac took place at midday.[44] And in his description of Jacob's vision of the Logos he stresses the light which surrounds and flows from the Logos.[45]

While none of these uses of "Day" and "Light" by Philo with respect to the Logos is echoed precisely by John's "my day," there is enough scope among the many possible referents for "day" to make one hesitant to pin it down to any specific one. Hence, while we cannot point to a passage in Philo which will show that John is dependent on Philo for his choice of words here, we have shown that the linchpin of most current interpretation is far from secure. If our interpretation falters over "my day," so do other interpretations falter over the same phrase, although for different reasons. Indeed, since interpretations which begin by identifying the "day" have such a dubious starting point, and since they cannot satisfactorily explain other elements in the passage, we believe we have disposed of them. Our confidence is reinforced by the fact that our

analysis makes clear sense, as no previous analysis has done, of Jesus' claim that "before Abraham was, I am." We have shown that in Philo the discussion of *Egō eimi* as the highest form of covenant is directly tied to the story of the promise of the birth of Isaac. Jesus, the incarnate Logos, expresses directly what the Logos present in the heavenly messenger only implied to Abraham.[46]

Implications

We certainly have no illusions that the argument we have presented in this article will signal a retreat from the advances made in recent decades in the direction of understanding the Palestinian-Jewish elements in John's Gospel. We recognize, however, that the advocates of Philonic, or at least of Hellenistic-Jewish, influence on the Fourth Gospel have dwindled to too small a minority, and we hope to see a growing interest in detailed comparative analyses of Johannine passages and the writings of Philo, even if the conclusion reached is that "we have not dependence on the part of the fourth evangelist but rather a common theological background and climate of thought."[47]

One such detailed investigation might focus on Philo's use of the Good Shepherd imagery. In Agr 50-52, Philo writes as follows:

> Indeed, so good a thing is shepherding that it is justly ascribed not to kings only and wise men and perfectly cleansed souls but also to God the All-Sovereign. The authority for this ascription is not any ordinary one but a prophet, whom we do well to trust. This is the way in which the Psalmist speaks: "The Lord shepherds me and nothing shall be lacking to me" (Ps. xxiii.1). It well befits every lover of God to rehearse this Psalm. But for the Universe it is a still more fitting theme. For land and water and air and fire, and all plants and animals which are in these, whether mortal or divine, yea and the sky, and the circuits of sun and moon, and the revolutions and rhythmic movements of the other heavenly bodies, are like some flock under the hand of God its King and Shepherd. This hallowed flock He

> leads in accordance with right and law, setting over it His true Word and Firstborn Son Who shall take upon Him its government like some viceroy of a great king; for it is said in a certain place: "Behold I AM, I send My Angel before thy face to guard thee in the way" (Exod. xxiii.20). Let therefore even the whole Universe, that greatest and most perfect flock of the God Who Is, say, "The Lord shepherds me, and nothing shall fail me." (*PLCL* 3.135)

This passage is so strikingly reminiscent of John at several levels that it cries out for serious scrutiny.

NOTES

[1]C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1953) 54. Dodd's statement must be qualified at least to the extent of noting that R. H. Lightfoot (*St. John's Gospel: A Commentary* [ed. C. F. Evans; Oxford: Clarendon, 1956] 6) provides but a single mention of Philo, with an admonition to remember that his works originated at Alexandria. Philo plays no part at all in Lightfoot's exegesis, even in the section on the Logos concept and its background. And A. W. Argyle ("Philo and the Fourth Gospel," *ExT* 63 [1951-52] 385-86), writing just before Dodd's book appeared, opened his article by saying, "It is not customary nowadays to interpret the Fourth Gospel in the light of the writings of Philo."

[2]K. and S. Lake, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harper, 1937) 53; R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966) lvii-lviii; R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 27; W. Schmithals, "Introduction" to Bultmann, ibid., 12; and C. C. Torrey, "The Aramaic Origin of the Gospel of John," *HTR* 16 (1923) 318.

[3]It is interesting to notice, however, that Torrey ("The Aramaic Origin," 311) had a dream of this sort, but did not dream how strong a support the "miracle" when it actually occurred would provide for his general anti-Hellenistic thesis: "There is nothing fantastic or improbable in the conjecture that if some miracle could have saved for us the literature circulating in Palestine at the dawn of the present era, we should find in it many able treatises, of various degrees of originality, embodying aspects of Hellenistic speculation which were commonplaces in all the learned centres."

[4]R. McL. Wilson ("Philo and the Fourth Gospel," *ExT* 65 [1953-54] 47-49) criticizes the effort of Argyle ("Philo and the Fourth Gospel") to draw several lines straight from Philo to John. Wilson insists that a common background is the only warrantable inference we can make. We shall return to Argyle's argument later in this article.

[5]W. Sanday, *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Scribners, 1905) 189. It is instructive to notice, however, that E. F. Scott, who was at pains to minimize the depth of the influence of Alexandrian thought on John, nonetheless wrote as follows (*The Fourth Gospel: Its Purpose and Theology* [2nd ed.; Edinburgh: Clark, 1908] 55): "It may be granted (for this appears to be more than probable) that he had some direct acquaintance with the works of Philo, and frequently draws from them, but it does not

follow that his thought is dependent, in more than a very partial sense, on that of Philo." There is here, perhaps, a rough parallel to the Uncertainty Principle in quantum physics--if John knew Philo, his thought is not "Philonic"; if John's thought is "Philonic," he did not know Philo. Sanday's sober caution (*Criticism*, 199) is salutary: "We cannot verify anything. We have no materials for the purpose. We can only deal a little with probabilities." We can, however, at least do that. Wilson ("Philo and the Fourth Gospel," 49) implies there is no ground between "certainty" and the "realms of pure conjecture."

[6]F.-M. Braun, *Jean le Théologien* (Paris: Gabalda, 1964) 2.298, cited by Brown (*John*, lviii).

[7]J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1928) 2.321. Also, J. Moffatt chose the variant as the text for his translation. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1965) 292. Bultmann, *John*, 327 n. 3; cf. the "Postscript" by H. Thyen (p. 744) concerning the readings of P^{75} and P^{66} (Bodmer Papyrus II), the latter of which reads ἐὡρακας;

[8]Bernard (*John*, 2.305) argues the dative-accusative difference; but cf. C. H. Dodd ("À l'arrière plan d'un dialogue johannique," *RHPR* 37 [1957] 6, cited by Brown [*John*, 354]), who argues that the distinction is meaningless in this context. Editorial inattention: Brown (*John*, 354-55). Textual dislocation: Bultmann (*John*, 312-15), where chap. 8 is dismembered into several fragments which are redistributed throughout the gospel on the basis of "conclusive demonstrations" to avoid "clear impossibilities" of the text as it stands, and where the brief Abraham section we are concerned with in this article is declared with "certainty" to be "a conclusion" for which there is no "introduction," making it clear that parts of the text "have been lost." The arbitrary, a priori nature of Bultmann's source-criticism of the Fourth Gospel at this point is, it seems to us, as crystal clear as he considers his conclusions to be.

[9]*Midrash Rabbah: Genesis* (trans. H. Freedman and M. Simon; London: Soncino, 1939) 1.376; cf. H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (4th ed.; München: C. H. Beck, 1963-65) 2.525-26.

[10]Barrett, *John*, 291. Cf. GenR 44:15, where God's ritual instructions to Abraham in Gen 15:8-9 are interpreted in the manner of apocalyptic as a cryptographic clue to the entire future. Nils A. Dahl ("The Johannine Church and History," in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper* [ed. William

Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder; London: SCM, 1962] 134 and n. 18) acknowledges that "the reference here must be to an experience of Abraham during his life on earth," but then he immediately concludes that "according to Jewish lore... Abraham...had a vision of heaven and hell, and of the time to come and the end of the world. In the Fourth Gospel this vision is taken to have been a vision of Christ's day, in analogy to Isaiah's vision of his glory." Bruce Edward Schein ("Our Father Abraham" [Ph.D. dissertation; New Haven: Yale University, 1972]) has dealt at length (pp. 182-191) with this section of John, and gathers evidence from many apocalyptic sources for the portrayal of Abraham as "Prophet-Seer" based on the "Covenant of the Pieces" in Genesis 15 (pp. 51-59). He does have to admit, however, that "what Abraham saw in the main dream of Genesis 15 is not decided definitely in this historical period" (p. 54), that is, in the period in which John was written. Schein notes (p. 56 n. 1) that the relevant apocalyptic materials are usually dated late first century at the earliest. His analysis of the overall effect of John 8:56-58 strikes us as basically right--the evangelist succeeds in having Jesus displace both Isaac and Abraham in the hierarchy of holiness--but we believe Schein begs a crucial question when he writes (p. 187): "Jesus had spoken in normal apocalyptic terms of Abraham seeing the day of salvation."

[11]F. Blass and A. Debrunner (*A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961] 392.1.a) render "he longed with desire, rejoiced that he was to...." However, E. C. Colwell (*The Greek of the Fourth Gospel* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1931] 113-15) argues persuasively for the translation "rejoiced to see," on the basis of Hellenistic usage. Still, one would have to agree with W. Milligan and W. F. Moulton (*The Gospel According to John* [International Revision Commentary on the New Testament 4; New York: Scribners, 1883] 211) that "the Greek words...are very peculiar." B. F. Westcott (*The Gospel According to St. John* [London: J. Murray, 1880; reprint, London: Clarke, 1958] 2.27) struggled gamely to make the phrase less troublesome: "The peculiar construction may be explained by considering that the joy of Abraham lay in the effort to see that which was foreshadowed. It lay not in the fact *that* he saw, nor was it *in order to* see; but partial vision moved him with the confident desire to gain a fuller sight."

[12]Cf. G. H. C. Macgregor (*The Gospel of John* [Moffatt New Testament Commentary; New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.; preface dated 1928] 223), who suggests many possibilities, including a cross-reference to Heb 11:13, but rejects the contention that "Abraham had any such vision while still on earth (e.g., figuratively in the birth of Isaac; Gen. 21:1ff.)" in favor of the view that Jesus means Abraham "is *not* dead, as the Jews wrongly hold (52), but

still consciously follows the fortunes of his people (cf. Mk. 12:26f.), 'and he rejoiced' at Christ's coming, even while that people scorned it." The cross-reference to Mark is ingenious, but surely far-fetched. Westcott (*John*, 27) suggests tentatively that "the faith shown in the offering up of Isaac may have been followed by some deeper, if transient, insight into the full meaning of the promises then renewed. Such faith was in itself, in one sense, a vision of the day of Messiah." This seems to us to amount to a confession on Westcott's part that he really did not know what to make of the passage, even though he subsequently declared with confidence that, figuratively interpreted, either the birth of Isaac or the sacrifice of Isaac provides the explanation of the Johannine passage (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [London: Macmillan, 1889] 367, commenting on Heb 11:17-19).

[13]Torrey, "The Aramaic Origin," 329; argument repeated in his *Our Translated Gospels* (New York: Harper, 1936) 144, 148; C. F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922) 111. Burney's long footnote (pp. 111-12) argues unconvincingly that the Jerusalem Targum on Genesis 15 provides the proper background for an understanding of the exegesis that would have been familiar to Jesus and his hearers.

[14]Both Bultmann (*John*, 15) and Colwell (*Greek*, 114-15) call attention to Semitic parallelism. Colwell's whole book is a theoretical and practical attack on the arguments for an Aramaic original of the Fourth Gospel.

[15]J. De Zwaan, "John Wrote in Aramaic," *JBL* 57 (1938) 164-65.

[16]Brown, *John*, cxxx.

[17]Ibid., 359.

[18]Gen 17:1; Mut 1. The text of Philo used throughout this article is that of *PLCL*, with occasional slight emendations in the translation.

[19]Somn 1.189-90, 227-30, 238-41.

[20]Post 1; Quod Deus 54; Somn 1.39-40, 237; cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard, 1947) 1.116.

[21]See for example: Conf 145-48; Fuga 101.

[22]Cf. E. R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1962) 100 (the text from "while God exists..." follows Goodenough's translation).

"Goodness" is an unimportant variation for "Creative Potency"; cf. Abr 124.

[23]Cf. E. A. Speiser (*Genesis* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1964] 125), where it is argued that such is the pre-J reading.

[24]Cf. Migr 157; Abr 111-12, 205-206; Leg All 3.217-19, for other examples of a like interpretation of the laughter.

[25]Vita Mos 1.75; Quod Det 160.

[26]Goodenough, *Introduction*, 143.

[27]Cf. *PLCL* 5.208 n. 3.

[28]Philo so uses it himself in Migr 157, as is pointed out in the *PLCL* note.

[29]Argyle, "Philo and the Fourth Gospel," 385-86.

[30]J. Drummond, *Philo Judaeus; or The Jewish-Alexandrian Philosophy in Its Development and Completion* (2 vols.; London: Williams and Norgate, 1888); A. Gfrörer, *Philo und die alexandrinische Theosophie, oder vom Einflusse der jüdisch-ägyptischen Schule auf die Lehre des neuen Testaments* (2 vols.; Stuttgart: Schweizerbart, 1831).

[31]Cf. Gfrörer, *Philo*, 1.286-93; Drummond, *Philo*, 2.239-50; Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.377, also makes the same point.

[32]Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.126-27.

[33]Migr 103; Op 25 (where, however, there is some question about the authenticity of the reading).

[34]Drummond, *Philo*, 2.159-60; cf. Gfrörer, *Philo*, 1.180-86.

[35]Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.376-77.

[36]Op 139.

[37]Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.236-38.

[38]See Gfrörer (*Philo*, 1.293-95), where he points out that in another place Philo does speak of "the Logos" as present here--but only because Philo at this point was paying no attention to the three equally dignified angels, but only to the one who led the way to Sodom.

[39]Drummond, *Philo*, 2.250-51.

[40]Somn 1.85.

[41]Somn 1.75.

[42]Leg All 1.19-21.

[43]Cf. A. Grillmeier, S.J., *Christ in Christian Tradition* (2nd rev. ed.; Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 1.45, quoting Marcellus of Ancyra in Eusebius, *Contra Marcellum* 1.2; *De ecclesiastica theologia* 1.18 (*Eusebius Werke*, GCS [1906] 4.12, 79, 192).

[44]Abr 119.

[45]Praem 36ff.

[46]Cf. H. Odeberg (*The Fourth Gospel Interpreted in Its Relation to Contemporaneous Religious Currents in Palestine and the Hellenistic-Oriental World* (1929; reprinted, Amsterdam: Grüner, 1968] 306-10), where the Philonic interpretation is dismissed in favor of a mixture of Jewish and Gnostic speculation. Odeberg's analysis of the *Egō eimi* is, we think, rather fuzzy, lacking the precision of the connection with covenantal formulae.

[47]Wilson, "Philo and the Fourth Gospel," 47.

APPENDIX

We want to thank Professor Earle Hilgert for drawing our attention to the short treatise, *De Deo*. *De Deo* is one of those treatises for which the Greek original is lost and exists only in an Armenian translation made in the sixth century. While we are not competent to judge the status of the Armenian works attributed to Philo, and while *De Deo* is especially controversial, as is attested by the fact that it is not included in any standard edition of Philo, H. A. Wolfson makes use of it in his monumental two volume work, *Philo*. The only convenient source for it is a Latin translation in *Philonis Judaei Paralipomena Armena*, by Jean Baptiste Aucher, Venice, 1826.

De Deo is of interest to us because it illustrates Philo's exegesis. It begins in chapter 3 with a discussion of the appearance of The Three Men at Mamre and explains in chapter 4 the vision in the same manner as does Abr 121 (p. 172, above). It then proceeds to interpret this vision by means of Exod 25:22: "I will speak to thee from above, from the Mercy Seat between the two Cherubim" in chapter 5. Again the exposition is almost identical to that found in Fuga 101 (see p. 175, above) with one notable exception. In the passage from *De Fuga*, the presence of the Logos is clearly affirmed. While the Logos is mentioned in the *De Deo* passage, there is only an oblique reference to him as God's agent in Creation. Thus the *De Deo* passage is not as useful for our argument as is the passage from *De Fuga*. However, the exposition then proceeds in chapter 6 to gloss Exod 25:22 with Isa 6:1: "I saw the Lord seated above (*sic*) high and lifted up" (see above, pp. 161-62).

Although *De Deo* does not really strengthen the case for our thesis that Abraham was aware of the presence of the Logos at the time Isaac's birth was announced, it does bear out our procedure in using Philo's commentaries on these scattered passages from Scripture to interpret each other.

De Deo provides evidence for an exegetical tradition which links Isa 6:1 and Exod 25:22 to the promise that Abraham would have a son.